

BACK RUN BRIDGE (RUIN)

Approximately 2,000 feet (610 meters)
upstream and south of the confluence of
Third Run and Back Run
Harrisville Vicinity
Ritchie County
West Virginia

HAER No. WV-67

HAER
WVA,
43-HARVL.V,
1-

PHOTOGRAPHS

WRITTEN HISTORICAL AND DESCRIPTIVE DATA

HISTORIC AMERICAN ENGINEERING RECORD
National Park Service
Northeast Region
Philadelphia Support Office
U.S. Custom House
200 Chestnut Street
Philadelphia, PA 19106

HISTORIC AMERICAN ENGINEERING RECORD

HAER
WVA,
43-HARV.L.V,
1-

BACK RUN BRIDGE (RUIN)

HAER No. WV-67

Location: Approximately 2,000 feet (610 meters) upstream and south of the confluence of Third Run and Back Run, Harrisville vicinity, Ritchie County, West Virginia

U.T.M.: 17.494140.4339620

Quad: Harrisville, West Virginia

Date of Construction: 1915

Engineer: Unknown

Present Owner: Little Kanawha Soil Conservation District
Route 5 Box 1000
Parkersburg, West Virginia

Present Use: Abandoned

Significance: The bridge abutments along Back Run are part of an impressive list of engineering structures built by the Harrisville Southern Railroad, a Ritchie County short line. They were built with the labor of Italian stone masons, and exhibit fine craftsmanship. Eligible for the National Register of Historic Places, they are a visible reminder of the short line railway age in Ritchie County.

Project Information: This ruin is part of a larger mitigation study undertaken at the request of the National Resources Conversation Service in connection with their proposed reservoir project.

Past & Present, Consultants
The Kemp Group, Inc.
429 Riley Street
Morgantown, WV 26505
January 2000

Summary Description of Site

Bridge abutments which once supported a Harrisville Southern Railroad bridge lie on both sides of Back Run. The abutment on the west side consists of four complete courses of large rectangular sandstone blocks with an incomplete fifth upper course. It measures 24.5' wide, 6.56 feet high, and 2.8 feet thick. Mortar is present between each course, but absent between blocks within courses. The eastern abutment is collapsed with the exception of one block in the lowest course. A bridge deck of approximately 85' long once spanned the distance between the grades above the abutments.

History of Ritchie County Railroads

The completion of the nation's first trans-Appalachian railroad, the Baltimore & Ohio Railroad main stem, from Baltimore, Maryland to Wheeling, Virginia in 1852 provided access to the Atlantic coast for Virginians in the northwestern part of the state, but left stranded those in the more central, Parkersburg and Clarksburg, areas. Efforts to secure a more southern route for the main stem with an Ohio River terminus at Parkersburg had begun in the 1840s, but had failed due to political machinations of southern Virginia interests.

Citizens from Parkersburg and Clarksburg continued their fight for a railroad, however, and in 1851 they gained from the Commonwealth of Virginia the incorporation of the Northwestern Virginia Railroad. The corporation planned to build an extension of the B&O main stem from Grafton, where it turned northwest to reach Wheeling, through Clarksburg to Parkersburg. Previously surveyed by B&O engineer, Benjamin Latrobe, this route was actually superior because it provided a more direct line to Cincinnati and St. Louis, and had more moderate grades. Construction began in December of 1852, and, after several financial crises, was completed to Parkersburg on December 31, 1856. One hundred and four miles long, with twenty-three tunnels and numerous bridges, the Northwestern Virginia Railroad was subsequently taken over by the B&O and became its Parkersburg Branch.

The Parkersburg Branch of the B&O passed through the rich farmland and oil and gas fields of Ritchie County, where it spawned the small towns of Pennsboro, Cornwallis, and Cairo. But, in this era of poor roads, branch lines were required to open up the more remote areas of the county, including the county seat, Harrisville, and take full advantage of the B&O artery.

The Cairo and Kanawha Railway was the first short line built in Ritchie County. Construction began in 1865 on the three-foot, narrow-gauge line that stretched seventeen miles south from Cairo on the B&O to McFarland. Built to exploit the rock asphalt discovered just north of McFarland, the C&K carried passengers as well until it was shut-down in 1877 as a result of the closing of the asphalt mine. The railway laid idle until 1890, when an oil boom near McFarland induced Parkersburg capitalist, Henry S. Wilkin, to purchase and upgrade it. The line was

renamed the Cairo & Kanawha Valley Railway. Affectionately called the Calico Road, the C&KV continued to operate until 1929, when revenues fell off due to competition from road transport, and it was forced to shut down.

Harrisville gained its first railway with the construction of the Pennsboro, Harrisville, and Ritchie County Railway, which was incorporated in 1873. This railway linked Harrisville to the B&O at Pennsboro. Its local stockholders were forced to sell to a Baltimore firm, Kimball Tyler and Company, in 1880, however, following the Panic of 1873 and the ensuing depression. The road changed hands again in 1902, when prominent Harrisville businessman, banker, and politician, M.K. Duty, purchased and renamed the line the Lorama Railway in honor of his wife. Shortly thereafter an extension was built from Hannahdale to Pullman. Like the C&KV, the Lorama suffered in the 1920s due to competition from road transport, and was shut-down in 1925.

History of Harrisville Southern Railroad and Bridge

The third short line in Ritchie County, and the second to reach Harrisville, was the Harrisville Southern Railroad. It was incorporated in 1908 by a group of Harrisville businessmen headed by hardware dealer W.S. Stout. The goal was to link Harrisville to the B&O station at Cornwallis in the western part of the county. Due to financial difficulties, construction dragged on for several years until 1915, when the line was opened for traffic.

The Harrisville Southern had the distinction of being one of the few short lines in the state--and the only in Ritchie County--to have been built to standard gauge of 4 feet 8 ½ inches. This allowed the railroad to interchange cars with the B&O. Only 6.154 miles long, it also had the more dubious distinction of being one of West Virginia's shorter short lines.

From Harrisville the route followed Back Run and Third Run for 1.5 miles, then joined the North Fork of the Hughes River valley. From this point, it followed a tortuous path until it reached the junction with the B&O at Cornwallis. The line was constructed of 60-pound relayed rail. The railroad operated two passenger/freight buildings in Harrisville and two at Cornwallis.

Brooks Pepper, long-time dispatcher for the B&O, described the operations of the Harrisville Southern in his memoir, 'Ritin' and Railin''. According to Pepper, the railroad's equipment, most of it second-hand, consisted of one locomotive, a 2-6-0, one box car, and five passenger coaches, one of which was a combination car. Two round trips were made each day between Cornwallis and Harrisville. Freight consisted of oil and gas products and equipment, lumber, livestock, flour, and hay, with the five passenger coaches reaching full capacity on weekends.

The Interstate Commerce Commission's Engineering report, which was completed in 1927 from an inventory conducted in June, 1919, briefly described eleven bridges on the line, all of which

had a completion date of 1915. These bridges had a total length of 737 feet. The report also lists twelve trestles with a total length of 1,288 feet. Bridges and trestles were of timber construction, deck plate girder spans, or of I-beams with deck plates. Fourteen culverts were also listed for the line. The greatest engineering feat of the railroad, according to Brooks Pepper, was the trestle of five or six hundred feet which carried the rails into the Harrisville Southern depot at Cornwallis.

Like Ritchie County's other two short lines, the Harrisville Southern was shut down in the 1920s due to competition with road transport. Ironically, it made its last runs hauling sand and gravel to Harrisville for the construction of paved roads. The owners of the railroad company were forced to sell the property through a sheriff's sale on October 26, 1929, but retained the right to remove the rails, bridges and bridge timbers, and trestles, which they took-up and sold shortly thereafter.

The bridge abutments along Back Run are part of what must be considered an impressive list of engineering feats for a short line railroad of this size. Along with other abutments, they were built with the labor of Italian stone masons, and exhibit fine craftsmanship. They are a poignant reminder of the short line railway age in Ritchie County.

SOURCES OF INFORMATION

A. ENGINEERING DRAWINGS

No engineering drawings are known to exist.

B. HISTORIC VIEWS

No historic views are known to exist.

C. INTERVIEWS

No interviews were conducted .

D. BIBLIOGRAPHY

Ankrom, James. "The Calico & Kanawha Railway," Railroad Model Craftsman. Vol. 52, No. 12 (May, 1985).

Gray and Pape, Inc. "Phase II Cultural Resources Investigations of the North Fork Hughes River Ritchie County, West Virginia," October 16, 1995.

Past & Present, Consultants. "North Fork Hughes River Bridge, HAER No. WV-68," report for Natural Resources Conservation Service, 1998.

Pepper, Brooks. 'Ritin' and Railin'. Richwood, W. Va.: Jim Comstock, 1973.

Six, S. Dean. "The Harrisville Southern Railroad," Light Iron, Short Ties. Vol. VII, No. 4 (December, 1989).

E. LIKELY SOURCES NOT YET INVESTIGATED

If found, the records of the Harrisville Southern Railroad company probably would add greatly to our knowledge of the site.

BACK RUN BRIDGE (RUIN)

HAER No. WV-67

(Page 6)

